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The Insight of Faith

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THE INSIGHT OF FAITH

HENRY WILDER FOOTE

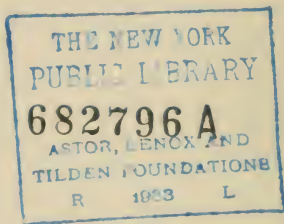
Minister of King's Chapel

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To the young friends
at King's Chapel
for whom memory can fill
these silent words
with the persuasion of
a voice and a life
this book
is affectionately dedicated

THE INSIGHT OF FAITH.

THE universe is as full of truth and goodness as it is of light. And no more surely does the constant day return alike to "the just and the unjust" than true lives will rebuke our untruth, and earnest opportunities rebuke our reluctant sloth of spirit by their brave and cheerful solicitings, and the gospel haunt us with its warnings and its invitations.

The possibilities of evil and weakness which are in every soul may become *realities* of good and

strength. Exactly for that end is life given us ; and all its encouragements and all its hardnesses invite us toward that grand result. Virtue can find one out, be it practised never so silently in the recesses of the spirit. Truth and goodness can find one out, be they only believed in and trusted in. You cannot love the truth and speak it, love purity and make it the star of your life, without truth and purity shining through you. You cannot make God and Christ your friends without their upholding you in life and in death.

Do you think that you can twist only sleazy threads into the cord of

life, and yet that the cord itself will be strong enough to bear a strain? And would it not be idle to dream that we can be peevish in the little rubs of life, unfaithful in its duties, cold in prayer, hard and ungracious in our judgments, unthankful and unloving, and, in spite of ourselves, be made saints of God?

We need to cultivate religion as we would cultivate any other habit, if we would have our God nourish it with the strength which cometh down from heaven.

What is the secret of religion, do you ask? It is the same as the secret of any truth of life. It begins just where we are to-day.

Fidelity, honesty, purity, truth,—you can have no religion without them any more than you can have any life at all that is worth the name without them.

And, on the other hand, you can have no life that is complete until all these run up into the spiritual virtues which are their perfection, and are warmed and made alive by religious trust.

Get a little inside these uninteresting lives all about you. Find the best that is in them, by bringing to them the best that is in you. Have faith that they appreciate great and true thoughts, that they keep burning a lamp of some unselfish love and trust in

the hidden places of their souls. Build your social intercourse on the things that are real in all our lives, not on the commonplaces. Make the law of your being a law of sympathy, not one of repulsion; and, so sure as the daylight is stronger than the night, you will find that life becomes larger and sweeter for you continually.

In the intercourse of daily life a large part of its most trying frictions comes from the censorious spirit.

A great deal of the kindness of New Englanders is soured by ungraciousness,—it is kind, but not kindly; and a great deal more is

locked up in people's hearts, and never comforts any one but themselves. Now, thoughtfulness and patience, a serene cheerfulness, a large tolerance, the quick eye to see where we can help, the hand as quick in good ministries, make light in many a dark place: they are the divine order for bringing beauty and peace into the tumult of this human fellowship in which we are set; and they are graces of spirit which it is immensely within our power to acquire and increase.

“Fellow-laborers together with God,” the Scripture calls us. We are workers with Him in His plan; and yet we are not without our

share in it, too. Unless He did our work for us, we must do it ourselves; and His way of doing it *for* us is to do it *through* us,—not necessarily that part of the world's work which we think we should like to do, but that part of it which He sees it best that we should do to help out His infinite purpose for us and all His children.

And it is best for *our own sake*, too. For what is His plan is our blessing.

In the battle of life men stand shoulder to shoulder, each at his own post. If one falls back, his neighbor falters. We may well ask ourselves, remembering this,

whether we think enough of the duty of *silence* about our troubles, lest we cast them needlessly on other hearts,—whether we think enough of the duty of *strength*, that we may encourage them to be stronger.

Every one has the burden of ignorance, which can only be borne in humility; of weakness, which can only be lifted by prayer; of sin, which only repentance and a new heart toward God can do away; of sorrow, which a childlike spirit toward the heavenly Father can alone bear.

But we have also the duty *to be strong*. Bear the burden, and it will really bear you.

The iron laws of life are the facts of things which God has made, as surely as He has made anything; and there can be no discord between His works in one way and His word in another way. The spiritual science which is in Jesus Christ cannot contradict the sternest fact that we know; but it *can* go to the heart of it, and can show under its roughest disguise that it has a meaning of truth and love.

(*Work* as if on you alone in the universe depended success, and *trust* as if all depended on the power of your God.

That Jesus Christ is specially and wonderfully the Revealer and

the Revelation of the Divine — as the Scripture declares the image of the invisible God — I surely believe. It seems to me that the more the world advances in knowledge, dropping its plummet further and further into the sea of Being and still finding that it is beyond soundings, the more sure a stay and hold amid the swaying tides of all beside is given by the abiding disclosure of God's goodness and providence and fatherhood which Jesus gives, and which I find in him alone. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father": the Christian world for all these ages has gazed into the shining of that face, and has felt that rays of the Eternal

Mercy shone there, which brought the light and strength and peace of the very heaven to human hearts.

It is Christ himself who is the substance of the Truth which he reveals. He bears witness to the nature of God and the nature of man, and the eternal life which now is and is to be forever; and our undying love and gratitude and reverence go out to meet him, because he stands before us so fully at one with the Father that the spiritual truths of God's kingdom and of the Being of God Himself are perfectly revealed to us in his word and life.

The truth of God never changes in its essential heart; and so he who has perfectly taught it is for that reason forever the Master of the soul that receives it.

The deep heart of God made known and accessible to His children,—this and nothing less than this we touch in Jesus Christ.

The thing to desire is that we and all men may more and more be filled with the vision of God and of man as we see them “in the face of Jesus Christ.” Even in the New Testament we find that, if the writers had defined him, they might have done it dif-

ferently one from another; but they see *him*, and him alone, under God, and in him they come together.

The presence of God really felt, with what we do and what we are, is the infallible judgment. The simple contrast between what we are, on the one hand, and what He is and what He would have us be, on the other, is the condemnation. In this sense, what mistake so great as to think to postpone the day of judgment to the end of the world? The day of judgment is to-day and every day, if we but knew it. Will not the thing which distinguishes the day at last be simply this,—that

then we shall have the vision of God more clearly, and, seeing Him, shall see ourselves and our lives utterly revealed in His light? Well may we say with the prophet of old, "But who may abide the day of His coming? or who shall stand when He appeareth?"

Here it is that the religion of Christ comes to us with its double and blended power to humble and to raise us. In him the heart of the Revelation is lived into human life. The infinite judgments voice themselves unerringly; the infinite mysteries disclose their meaning enough to waken heart and hope in us; the infinite Love breaks forth as the sun from behind a cloud. From the depths

of a spirit at one with God, our Saviour discloses to us the truth and the justice and the mercy of God: the infinite Judge is revealed as the infinite Father.

“Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.” We may not think it strange if we find that the Christian demonstration follows this law. If the Christian arguments are not addressed only to sight, but also to the spiritual vision, it is because the spiritual vision is a legitimate part of the human being, and is not to be ignored. If some of them are addressed exclusively to the spiritual vision and in no

wise to sight, there, too, the analogy in other realms of thought and life is followed; and it is because appeal is made to the highest and most enduring part of the soul. The appeal *transcends* sight: it is not necessarily *contrary* to sight. And a very practical conclusion follows. Even if you do not see *all the way through* your faith, you still have a right to believe that you are justified in believing.

In this insight of faith we can see the world of moral and spiritual truth shining with new light, and beyond this world the truth of the life immortal.

O friends, this is no empty vision: it is the very certainty of God. We need it in this eager world to arm us to battle down temptation, to deepen our earthly sight into heavenly insight, that we may look beyond the wrecks and woes of time to the serene and eternal shore. We need it that we may *believe* beyond the hardest thing that we *see*, in the justice and loving mercy of our God, the Father and Lover of souls.

As the four walls of that upper chamber vanished when Thomas gazed upon that divinely human face, so did the limitations of this narrow room of time melt away

into the infinite horizon of heaven. And so do they for us all, when we really look at Jesus Christ: we see immortality embodied and triumphant.

Leonardo da Vinci's fresco of the Last Supper, half seen through its decay, seemed to me more wonderful for the gracious veil of obscurity which time has thrown over it, leaving something to the imagination. The face of Christ is seen as in a dream only, yet as perhaps one may see it on first waking into the better life, before the clouds of earth have quite ceased to cling about the soul. I felt as if for the first time I had seen the realization of the ideal which we

have by instinct of the majesty, the beauty, the strength, the sorrow too, which belonged to him at that hour. It was as if we had touched the hem of his garment.

All of God's sun shines on our commonest day.

The by-ways always lie open to His light: however hedged about on their earthly sides, they are free toward heaven. There is no corner where my weakness can hide itself from His demanding call. There is no covert of sin shady enough to protect me from His light.

Nor can we find content in resolving that we will live in the world as we find it, trying only for fairly honest lives. Fairly honest lives are exactly what we cannot live without some deeper principle to hold them fast.

The temptations of worldliness will set the strongest head swimming sometimes; the temptations of business will overbalance the abstract advantage of doing about right; the temptations of passion will cloak themselves in the dark. And only the plain loyalties of conscience and spirit will bring those things straight, and make the life day by day square with the eternal truth of God.

The opportunity of saintliness comes into our special way of life, whatever it may be. All the power which was in the spiritual heroes of the elder time, all the chivalry which was in the "Saint George whose broken spear and dust-worn banner they pretend to show you," all the purity which was in the virgin saints, all the faith which was witnessed by the great army of martyrs and confessors,—these all wait to be incarnated anew in the honesty of your work, in the stainlessness of your thought, in the courage of your truth, in the steadfastness of your trust, in the sweetness of your charity.

Perhaps we should think the courtesy of thorough manners better worth cultivating if we would think what a *power* it is for good. The manners that reveal a really friendly heart, a true considerateness, a readiness to take trouble and pains to serve others, — these never deceive in the long run. They cannot be counterfeited successfully. But they can be acquired by practising the exterior form and the interior disposition together. They can be made a second nature outside where the heart is renewed in a loving spirit. And then they will move human hearts as no other power can.

The power of this Christian

courtesy which is in the very *nature* of the man will animate him in unimagined perils. When the Monitor "Tecumseh" was sinking in the bay of Mobile, the heroic Captain Craven stood aside instinctively to let the pilot go up first from the wheel-house by the narrow ladder which was the only way of escape, saying, "You first, sir." The vessel sank before he could follow. In all that sudden shock and terror the Christian gentleman could not be shaken out of the courteous habit of his life.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is "glad tidings of great joy": it

means not weakness, but power, not death, but life. If it speaks of sin, with yet louder voice it speaks of redemption; if of repentance, it is a repentance unto life; if of Christ's sufferings, also triumphantly of his victory; if of God's searching presence and compelling law, its message is bathed in the light of His infinite love, or calls us to the joy of children in their Father's world.

It cannot be too urgently said that it is not enough for us merely to *acquiesce* in Christianity. Yet is not this the best that can be said of not a little which calls itself by that great name? Does

it not take Christianity as, alas! it takes the blessed light and air of heaven, the boons of health and peace, as matters of course,—the benefits of Christianity as an old story, not as the power of life unto life to-day?

As the country path leads into the great highway that will take us round the world, so does the homeliest fidelity run into the great ways of God. There is no monotony in the Christian life. It is the accumulation of more and more,—larger powers with the using, fuller gifts with the spending, more generous life with the living. And it is an endless

progress. Sin and selfishness are stationary or retrograde. But, in the Christian, who ever exhausted the depths of communion which are in prayer? who has drained out all the possibilities of service and sacrifice which are in the cup of life? who has come to an end of that higher life which is hid with Christ in God?

The fact is that real growth in character comes as so many of the best gifts of God come,—by the way. In doing what we believe to be God's will for us, many things lie in the straight line of that fidelity. Every unselfish act makes unselfishness more possi-

ble. Every true word deepens our sense of truth. Every sacrifice broadens the nature. I do not suppose that Saint Paul ever thought what the effect on himself would be of obeying the heavenly vision. He saw God's will for him, and threw his whole grand soul into its service, that was all. But in that path awaited him all the gifts of courtesy and dignity, of widest knowledge of life and broadest culture,—a character weighty as pure gold, a soul in which faith had become sight.

We want to believe the *truth*. Anything less than that is not worthy to be held by human minds

and hearts in this earnest world. And we may be sure that anything which is partial and incomplete, which fails to fit into the wants and promptings of the human spirit and makes all the diviner side of things an enigma or a blank, hard wall, is not wholly true. It may be the half-truth which is the greatest falsehood. That only is the key which will fit all the wards of this most intricate lock.

There is not a human soul so small and poor but that it is large enough to be the battle-ground of the "earthly" and the "heavenly." The opposition is set right before you in the difficulty of every day's

life. Between dawn and dark there is time enough for the collisions of disinterestedness with selfishness in our dealings with our fellow-creatures, in the life of our own homes, time enough to meet or to evade the demands of homely faithfulness in our several work, time enough to confront the sturdy rebellion of passions and besetting sins against our spiritual nature, time enough to win or to lose heaven in.

Yes, we do quench the Spirit when we sin : we quench it when heart and mind become distempered from their balance by a fevered excitement, and when we

let ourselves become swallowed up in the pursuit of things which perish in the using, and content with low aims and trivial purposes such as do not become a child of God. And not seldom we think that it is somehow no fault of ours. We wait for the angel to descend to stir the muddy pool of our ordinary life; and we wait in vain. Yet all the time beside us is standing, unheeded and unknown, in the common opportunities which have been enough for the saints of God from the beginning of the world to this very hour to find all heaven in,—beside us, I say, is standing He who can make us whole.

When we go forward believing that what was true once is true forever, willing to try whether unselfishness does really brace the soul, whether love to God does really make the heart tender and strong, whether prayer meets an answering Spirit, and faith finds a door of hope, only then do we bring into our life the power which God meant it should have.

Human relations are divine revelations. ||

The gift of expression greatly needs cultivation. But how much wider is the room for expression than in speech only! Wherever

two persons meet, it might be found in the look of the eye or the grasp of the hand. There is a courtesy of thoughtfulness which would lend a finer flavor to ordinary intercourse, and would be ever finding occasions of benefiting others. “‘Quand tu entres chez un aveugle,’ dit un proverbe Arabe, ‘ferme les yeux.’” It is an exquisite expression of the way in which true hospitality will instinctively enter into the circumstances of those with whom it has to do.

Two things are implied by the fact that we are here, spiritual beings, in God's world: first, that

we are able to *see* that which is deeper than what we see; and, second, that, since God is helping our vision, the deeper it is and the better it is, so much the more can we confide in it. The vision which without Him answering might be visionary, *with Him answering* is what we call faith.

Sometimes we want to be ourselves the substitute for the daylight to those who are very dear to us and who suffer. But that we cannot be, neither can we be the substitute for God. There are secrets which lie between the soul alone and God alone. Deeper than my friend's silence, I know,

is the merciful dealing of God with my friend's spirit. And elsewhere, if not here, I shall see those treasures, and be glad.

Shall we doubt that "I will give thee the treasures of darkness" is true also with those who have been led through the valley of the shadow; that, as they pass through the mystery, it is into fuller light beyond,—the comfort of God's upholding hand, the joy of His free spirit, the welcome of long parted souls, the glad surprise of heaven?

With the Christian, immortality is not an intellectual speculation,

not a fancy or a reverie: it is a persuasion, calm and steadfast, which opens beyond the horizon of earth the sweep of an infinite eternity,—not empty and desert, but filled with the presence of God, and the light and joy of His service.

No one can tell the unending power for good which each of us may have in our homes, among our fellow-men, by faith in them,—how far we can strengthen their feeble desire for God and all good. Care, then, for the *soul* of people, and for *the soul* of what they do, as well as of what they are. Discriminate their desires and efforts and prayers from their follies and

their failures. Think of the highest in them, and not of the lowest.) And, if there are times when the public ear is filled with corruptions, still see to it that the bad and the feeble and the foolish things do not lead you to disbelieve the good.

You cannot do anything noble, helpful, unselfish, for another person, without its enlarging your own soul. You cannot make any gain in self-discipline and in character without its making you more loyal to Him who gives the moral law and inspires the conscience; nor can you come into living filial relations with the living God without at the same time becoming more

tender-hearted and more thoughtful toward His children, more strong and clear-sighted in your governance of yourself.

There is no *end* of growing in the Christian life, but its *beginning* is in the simplicity of the most natural relations to God and to men. The busiest have time enough for it; the most uncultured know enough for it; and the wisest can only then be truly wise when they have returned to that simplicity.

It is no wonder that to the disciples of Jesus it seemed that "the power of his resurrection" was manifested afresh in every life of one of his followers. The

wonder would be if this had not been so. Why should we speak of these things as if they were shut up within the covers of the New Testament? That which makes the New Testament the book of life for us is the fact that it testifies to a power which works and is alive *to-day*. A living faith is continually rising with Christ from the grave of an imperfect Past to new spiritual life. The soul which knows "the power of his resurrection" is the one which looks to and believes in and loves the things which he loved and which he *lived*. It seeks those things which its Master sought; and it seeks them, as he sought them, as *realities*.

It is only when some remarkable experience opens to us the depth of meaning that there is in life that we realize how on the surface we have been living, above what unsuspected deeps of heavenly grace. (It is by the supreme moments in our lives that we learn the meaning of all of life.) Only for a moment, do you say? and then again it is dim and dark. So I remember on a bitter December night, when a driving storm and darkness shut us in, and the great ship, far on her voyage toward home, was groping her way for the coast, so perilously near, with plummet and sounding line, the veil of mist and snow lifted for a little, and behold the *light* that

was our security. For a moment! but it was enough. Let the storm blow, and the darkness wrap us again in its pall! We knew that with the morning we should be safe on land. And so, in the moments when we see how much Christian faith means, we get the light which shows us where we are and how to get where we would be; and we can live by that, though again it should be dark and dim.

The great paradox of all Christian experience is this: that just when we come in the real spirit of discipleship and loyalty to accept the limitations, hard, but merciful, which are placed upon us, then

the hard law turns to us its other side, full of graciousness and light. At such times, when we look beyond the darkness of the present time into the eternal things that lie behind them, we seem almost to be set free from the hindrance of the present "Now through a glass darkly" into the fulness of the promise which sustained the great heart of the apostle himself, "but then face to face." The highest moments of our reach here, limited and imperfect though it be, come very near to that full fruition. They at least open the way to it, and give us some glimpses of what is to come.

Seek an honorable independence in money, but be not greatly anx-

ious beyond that. Resist with all your might the temptation to measure men and things by that standard. Gain your money if you can, and *use* it. It may be one of the best and kindest instruments of doing God's will. But remember that the golden key will lock as well as unlock the gates of the kingdom of heaven.

The world sees a conqueror in him who overcomes by *subduing*: the gospel sees a victor in him who overcomes by *rising above*.

Every great work accomplished rests on a lofty hope. When the

Fathers of New England laid the foundations of this new land in faith and prayer, what nerved them to their work but the vision which rose before them of a Christian commonwealth? Across the dreary wilds white with inhospitable winter, against the awful woods where lurked the savage, that ideal painted its bow of promise, and lured them on. And, though they could not build according to the Hebraic pattern which they saw, it is because they had it that we have all that we value most to-day.

Only they whose faces shine with the glory of some inspira-

tion which lifts them out of themselves shall ever do abiding work in this earnest world, and themselves shine in the memory of those who come after. To "press towards the mark of the *high* calling" is the secret of all true success.

Even in saying this, we say also that there must be a certain disappointment; for it is only the low standards which are easily reached. The ideal which is lofty enough to satisfy us must be beyond our full attainment. But there are two kinds of disappointment. The one kills effort, the other invigorates it. The one is the offspring of despair, the other

is the mother of hope. The disappointment which comes from self-seeking, baffled by running against another human will or against the inexorable laws of Providence, has no sweetness in it. If a man's hopes were but a subtle form of selfishness, the hopes will perish and self-will remain. But, if they were the losing of self in an unselfish loyalty to a grand ideal, *that* will shine the brighter for the falling away of what was only its perishing garment.

The way to rise above the disappointment is to fix our eyes not on others or our own failures, but on *the mark*, and press toward that.

Knowledge becomes wisdom when we regard each bit of it as a fragment of God's truth, and so precious in and for itself, and hold it as something to be made serviceable to others in any way possible; and money becomes true wealth when it is made and saved and used as a tool for God's work in the hand of his servant.

There is something very inspiring in the thought of the opportunity which is given to those who perform the service of song in the sanctuary,—the opportunity of lifting the souls of men and women out of their common cares and clouds into the spirit of prayer

and of faith, the opportunity of being ministers of God by the voice or the organ, the opportunity of *losing themselves* in their work, so that they shall disappear from thought and sight as persons, and simply leave a holier impulse in the hearts of those who hear them. And this opportunity of self-loss is the highest that comes to any one. God grant us all grace thus to lose ourselves in what we do!

The law of music is equally imperative in regard to *spoken* speech. This power which we have of communicating with each other by words is a real means

of grace. Yet how often is it so discordant that one is tempted to wish that the human race were dumb! I know no accomplishment which you can teach your child so sure to win regard as that of a cultivated, harmonious speech. For, in teaching that thoroughly, you will have to teach a sympathy warm enough to glow in the word, and a charity bright enough to drive away ugly shadows out of it.

We have all known persons whose voice strikes a key-note of hope and courage in our hearts,—the very memory of whose tones echoes in our deepest recollections with harmonies of the heaven

where we humbly trust those voices are now joining in higher praises. The voice is a gift and a grace, but it may also be an acquirement. And it is the duty of every one by cheerful tones to do something to bring steady strength into the world. There are those who wail with their first word, and bring the saddened tones of autumn into every company. There are those who jar the ear and pain the spirit by critical and complaining accents. But there is no one who cannot breathe serenity and good cheer through the voice, if only the spirit is serene. And that gift of "sweetness and light" in the spirit is within the reach of every child of God.

Music, as the handmaid of the Lord, has a lesson for us as large as the whole of life. It bids us, like itself, make all sides of life *praiseful*. Be not content to let a broken fragment of harmony now and then struggle through the discordant and jarring course of our common business, but lift that all up to a higher strain of faith and hope and love.

Said Pythagoras, "You may better throw a stone at random than an idle word." But the idle words drop from us as flowers from a child's hand.

Evil arises from bringing personal matters under discussion.

Can we not talk about principles and great things, living here "between two eternities," with all the inspiration of noble words that have been spoken and noble deeds that have been done, with the mystery of life around us, and the sanctity of death before us, and questions of the deepest and worthiest kind waiting to be settled?

Mystery wraps our little earthly life round with its deep, dark shadows. It is *shadow*; and we are creatures that love the sun. Only the soul that is lighted by a divine trust and upheld by a steady faith is great enough to meet the mystery unflinchingly. } And so men

try every way but the right way. They pretend that life is all sunshine, when their own hearts tell them better. They assert that the darkness is the punishment of sin, when the holiest are often called to walk in the thickest gloom; and they try to explain the inscrutable purposes of God, when "His ways are past finding out." But only a faith which is sufficient to believe beyond the seeing, and a love which is able to walk childlike and lowly with its God, are willing to acknowledge the stupendous mystery without losing their heart and trust.

The Christian *knows* through the heart that which is infinitely

more precious than to know God's doings,—something about God Himself. He knows His presence: he knows His love.

When you remember goodness, when you remember love, it is not as treasures which have gone from you into darkness, but as light whose continuing presence is made sure to you by the very shadow,—an inspiration and a hope, and not memory alone,—if absent from you, yet made sure to you by God's hand which comes between you and it for a little, only to uphold and guide you and to lead you again into that light.

My friends, the deep need of man is the best interpreter of the deep purposes of God. The cry that comes out of the heart of the nature which He has made testifies truly to the heart of His own nature: it testifies that it is not a cry into dark emptiness, but into the darkness where God is,—the answering God.

We are too apt to fall into the error of supposing that men are made by their *surroundings* instead of by their *thinkings*. That which we do is largely a matter of chance to us,—we are born into it or led into it we can hardly tell how,—it is *the way we do it* which

shows what we are; *i.e.*, it is our thoughts.

It would be matter for laughter in ourselves and others, did it not rather call for tears, as we see how *worry* alone, without any more substantial reason than itself, will vitiate all the wholesome grace of life. It takes away all repose from its victim and his friends. It comes in between man and man to spoil the comforts of society, like grains of obtrusive sand clogging the wheels of the world's motion.

Probably it is nothing actually present to incommode them, probably it is not even the forecasting

of things which are likely to come, certainly it is nothing which any amount of worrying will prevent. Rather is that spirit likely to bring on the very evils which it fears.

The causes of such a state of mind are various; but in every case they will be found to lie in the thoughts,—in false thoughts, which the thought of God would rectify; or low thoughts, which the thought of Him would raise; or anxious thoughts, which the thought of Him would pacify.

The first requisite in order to make the great thought of God familiar to the mind is to *think*

about Him. Bend the common thoughts in the countless ways in which we can school ourselves to think about anything we will. Discipline yourself to a quicker sense of the wrong you do yourself,—the trespass of which you are guilty towards God,—whenever you indulge the turbulent array of thoughts that war against this holy temper of peace in which the thought of Him is clothed.

Learn also to live *for the day*, putting forth all your powers in the joy of present service, leaving the past with its omissions, and the future with all its uncertainties, in the hand of Him who is able to care for it, and so ceasing

to glean from the fields of the one a burden of repinings, from the other a burden of fears.

God has given us a very practical way of educating the thoughts to this congenial spirit in our life with those about us. We receive light when we *make* light.

There come times in every one's life when pleasure is tasteless and vapid, when work palls on us, when the intellect tires of its questions, and literature is as tedious as a "twice-told tale." But then the heart asserts itself, and loves while it suffers, and is happier even in suffering than if it could sleep. (The soul that

loves lives, because by that great act something of the Divine Nature is enkindled in it.)) Therefore, do what you can in your life, make what you can of your life, but, above all, love the highest and deepest and best that you can.

This is what we love in our friends,— the heart of their being, the secret of what they are to be as God wills them to be, the truest thing they care for, the warmest affection that keeps their spirit young, the faith and hope and love which lie closest to their hearts. “In thee,” said the dying Bunsen to his wife, “have I loved the Eternal.” We must

take our friends as God takes them, in their best possibilities, in the things in them which are made for heaven. (And then, when the bitter separations come, we can keep our love alive: we need not fear to let it live, for the love itself is a promise of the faithful God.) For in heaven the stature is measured by love, and not by what men call genius, or skill, or wit, or fancy; and, therefore, those that love most and grieve most give themselves most to the care of God;—and He will never disappoint the hope of a loving heart.

/ Did you ever think of the pathetic and yet heroic chapters of

unwritten history that cover the rocky fields of New England with their monument of fidelity in the plain stone walls that seam the face of the landscape? Every stone was lifted into its place by patient toil : each is a memorial of the genuine and gritty qualities of manhood which have built New England character itself.

It may be that your sharpest judgments of another are right. Perhaps you do read that mysterious riddle of another human heart correctly. It is possible that you do unravel the tangled skein of motives, desires, interests, in which his mind and purpose are knotted

up; but it may be also that you are too shallow to understand his depths, too hard to sympathize with his tenderness, too calculating to gauge his unselfishness, too worldly to believe in his loftiness, too unspiritual to measure his religion.

One reason why the closing book of the New Testament is most dear to devout hearts is because of its full recognition of the tremendous earnestness and struggle of this human life of ours, and the way in which it brings the divine powers down into the heart of the struggle. The book was born out of the supreme pain of the early church, when the

blood of the martyrs was the seed through which it sprang from death unto life. Its key-note is in the promise again and again repeated "to him that overcometh."

To every one that finds how the deep places of these Scriptures of our comfort speak to answering deeps in our own hearts, the words seem to come like a trumpet-call, bidding us to take our place in the ranks of the great army of those who, through the Christian ages, have tested the promise, and found at last that it did not fail. It seems to say to you in the times which make the uttermost demand on your courage, your endurance, your faith:

There is something worth your struggling for: there are succors which you never can touch till your supreme need drives its artesian well down far beneath the desert land in which you find yourself; but the waters of divine healing which God has stored there will surely rise to quench your thirst. _____

The principle which goes down to the heart of the matter is to bring the same spirit into our lives, exactly where we are, which has transfigured life for the saints and heroes. That spirit is a living sense of God, of duty, of immortality.

We can sum it all up in a word :

the life that now is can be, ought to be, must be part of the life eternal.

There was once one who walked among men, a Teacher of more than mortal wisdom, in whom shone a power which drew men irresistibly, though why they could not comprehend. His wisdom, men might have said, would lead him in ways of honor and peace, his power would bend all earthly instruments to his service. So fondly hoped the few who followed him. But how different was the plan of God! He kept that holy one in closest communion with Himself. He led him by the arduous path of temptation, priva-

tion, loneliness of spirit, the lack even of a place to lay his head, the garden of agony, the cross of shame. He destroyed the hopes of disciple and friend, and gave to them also to drink of bitterest humiliation, doubt, and sorrow. Yet it was so only we know, as we read the wonderful story of the Gospel, that the sublime purpose of saving men from themselves as they made themselves to themselves as God would make them could be fulfilled. Out of that uttermost pain and loss there break on us wonderful revealings of the nature of the Divine Character and of the reality of the Divine Love. He disappointed the shallow hopes of his earthly

coming as Prince of the House of David, to come with prevailing sway in the human heart.

And do we see only mysterious dispensations in *our* disappointments? "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord."

The longest life is but an arc, and not the full circle; and old age should rather seem to us the twilight of a new morning than the coming on of night.

Do not feel as if the new year separated you from past joys, or shut a door between you and those

you love. Every new year only brings us nearer to the shining eternity of love.

“Ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we call Abba, Father.” No one who has ever watched a deaf child learning to speak the words which it can never hear—coming out from that prison of silence where no tone of love, no song of bird, no strain of music, can ever pierce the stillness—can forget the thrill of sympathy and surprise, the pathos of pain, the joy of discovery, which have come over him like a wave. True, they are broken and stammering syllables,

but they are human speech. A soul,—a living, human spirit,—a child of God, has waked from its slumber, has come out of its prison house, and through those broken forms of speech is reaching out to all knowledge and all faith,—to the sympathy of man, to the love of God.

Somewhat so, as I read these words of Saint Paul, do I seem to find the heart of their meaning. The simple, stammering forms with which we speak to God and call him Abba, Father, are the wakening of the soul to know him and to answer him. They are the beginning of the speech of angels, the opening of a whole new world. And, if our human sympathy re-

joices, how can we doubt that the powers of Heaven know a like feeling? Here, also, it must be true, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God."

Nay, we fail to read the beauty and the wonder of this vast radiant universe aright, unless we see in it the Divine Love itself bending over His child, trying to call out the response which, however feeble and childish, is the first syllable of the great name, Father.

Every step upward and onward, from winning your daily bread to acquiring the mind and heart of a Christian saint, rests on a difficulty overcome.

The better nature in us exults over hardship and privation as a seal of its divinity. Men spring with a deeper joy to man a life-boat in a raging sea than they feel at the thought of a pleasure voyage.

The characteristic of the Christian victory is its *inwardness*; that it is not gained over the *accidents* which lie around us, but, first of all, over the substantial difficulties which lie *within* us, and, after these and through them, over all outward things.

Where a great Duty and a great Hope have taken possession of

the soul, it must needs grow strong. It is as with those who set their mills where they are driven by the waters from Niagara. All the thunders of the cataract and all the volume of the vast inland seas are their reserved power. So the mind possessed of a Christian loyalty and a Christian trust is in connection with the Infinite. On that great tide of life and strength, all faint purposes, all half-hearted service, all flickerings of conscience, all paltry prejudice, must be swept away.

Where weakness is conquered, *self* is overcome. For selfishness is the child of a weak spirit, that

cannot soar above its mean environment,—the petty world of its own interests,—the dwarfing toil of shaping work and life to its own ends. Self is the great enemy to all worthy achievement, because it prevents us from seeing beyond our own circumscribed horizon. Self hinders all Christian progress, because it makes itself instead of God the centre of life and of love. Self does shining works for its own glory; but, after all, the taint of mortality is in all that it does or is. The Christian victory routs it at all these points, as the Christian spirit is in all vitally opposed to it.

The cry of Ajax in the Greek tragedy, "Light! give me light!" has been the cry of the human heart in every deepest hour. That which saves it from being a cry of despair is the fact, firm as the everlasting hills and shining as the stars, whence Science draws her affirmations,—the historical and spiritual fact that this needed light has shone upon men in the gospel and life of Jesus Christ. The eternal warrant for the permanence of Christianity is its fitness to the eternal need of God's children. The light of God's countenance shining in the face of Jesus Christ is a simple fact of experience, verified anew in every generation by myriads of the hum-

blest, most tried and desolate souls who have learned the deep things of God in the life which He has created. It is not a far-off fancy, it is here, a real and present power.

Remember what the light is which Jesus Christ has brought ; for it falls not so much on speculative questions, speculatively understood, *as* upon the deepest and most practical interests of the human soul. The great consolation of God's present love, as it is brought home to us in the word and life of his Son, the mighty light of practical righteousness and holiness and loving-kindness which shines forth on us in the radiant life of that great Friend of

man; the burning consciousness of our immortal destiny and our high opportunity which glows within us under his quickening breath; the fresh strength in daily duty which we gain at the thought that he has been before us wheresoever we may walk; the kindled hope in prayer which makes communion a frequent privilege, and builds altars on the commonest spot of labor or of sacrifice,—these should be enough to glorify the life of each.

There can be no forgiveness without real magnanimity. It takes a great soul to breathe the air of true generosity, and to live

in this world at all without being dwarfed to the stature of its poorer elements,—a greater soul than any of us can create in ourselves by simply resolving to be prouder than other people. That magnanimity is awakened within us at the touch of Christ,—of him who loved supremely, yet read unerringly the human heart, who suffered wrong as none other, and who prayed upon the cross, “Father, forgive them,” —the gentlest in his royalty, the most royal in his gentleness. The soul that comes near enough to him to touch him “in the press” of this crowded human world rises to a new conception of its opportunity and the joy of fulfilling it.

A better weapon than that which the stripling David took from the slain giant's grasp, whose huge blade had been the terror of the Lord's host, is that which we have won from victory amid seeming defeats,—the sword of patience and fortitude, of the generosity which surely conquers love at last, of the forgiveness which triumphs under wrong, and the magnanimity which will not let go its hope and trust in others' best.

The thought of God as the Law-giver is the root of all vital religion,—not merely that he has framed the world by perfect order and governs it by perfect law, but that the immutable law is written

in his own being, and that he cares whether we obey it. And all the whispers of conscience and all the higher, truer voices of mankind are the voices of the Divine Law in the human soul.

But it is "to bring us to Christ." And, when we have come to him, we find that law melts into love, and that the power of God's ever-living Spirit in our hearts makes obedience possible and glad and free.

Christian peace will be the peace of *power*. There have been those who reproached Christianity with being unmanly and spiritless. Some of those professing it may sometimes have been so; but it

was in spite of their Christianity, not because of it.

The Christian peace is strong, as all great things are strong; great enough to be calm and still. The peace of greatness is sublime, because it shows power under control.

That is the greatest gift which those whom we love can bestow upon us,—the quickening of our sense that the virtues which win our affection are a shadowing forth to us of what is in the Eternal.

Make your memories your hopes.

The old New England virtue of economy, in its true form, is a vir-

tue of real character. Without a wise economy there can neither be independence nor peace. It spares on the lower and selfish side, if need be, to lavish on the higher and unselfish side. Its great secret consists in "putting Thought before things."

What God bestows He never in the truest sense of His bestowing, takes away. In the memories which are the richest treasures of our maturer years He *giveth* as truly as in the first gifts which are poured upon us in the free morning of life, before we have learned how to prize them or to use them.

It is to men alone, the heirs of a vast and immortal nature, that the gift of loss and deprivation is sent, to bring them, if they will but follow "as dear children," into the very presence-chamber of God.

Too much has it been the way of the world to walk sad-thoughted and downcast through "this vast and radiant earth," refusing to be pleased with its beauty, shutting up the heart from too much sympathy with the joy which pulsates through it. We are too apt to sit in our own shadow, and then forget that the sun is shining.

—Joy is a duty. It may be laid down as a general principle that

the more of free gladness there is in our souls, the more capacity of divine love will be theirs, because they will be more open to childlike impressions from God and childlike relations towards Him.

Look in all things for the beauty which *is* their soul, and shall fill your soul. Seek it, and dwell in it; for, rightly understood, it is a part of your deepest life. But mark that it is when “rightly understood.” For it is certainly very easy to pervert this doctrine that it is our duty to delight in the beautiful into something selfish, earthly, devilish.

There is one plain way, and one alone,—not by *seeking* pleasure wherever it may be found, but by

finding it where we do not seek *it*, but something better.

Since we are set here so fast in the midst of duty that we cannot escape if we would, we must find a way, even if we cannot find beauty *in* duty, to *bring* beauty *out* of it. Do you suppose that God has made the rest of the world so beautiful that His laws cannot help evolving loveliness everywhere as they go on their shining course,—and that man's work is an intrusion, the only undivine thing in all this healthy activity of the universe?

To make task-work yield beauty and pleasure for us there are only

two ways. We must do our work in *the best way* or we must do our work *for other people*.

Much of our work is so directly related to the care of others, in the daily living with them, that it will be a perpetual struggle of rival wills and thwarting tastes unless we also live *for* them. It is a simple, though not an easy lesson. Subordinate yourself in your own mind to others. Your own whims, always; to some extent, also, where the duty calls, your own time, your own freedom. Learn to see God in your friends or in your work, and to love His children in Him, and Him in His children.

We cannot ask a better point of leverage from which to move our little fragment of the world toward truth and goodness than the point on which we have been placed. All that made saints and heroes of old strong and full of trust is as near to us as it was to them.

The final purpose of the fixed conditions in which our lives are set is to teach us to fit ourselves into God's plan for us,—not to alter God's plan to fit ourselves. The idea which so much hampers us, that in our attempt to do something for our own betterment or that of other people we cannot begin *where we are*, is nothing

less, if we probe it to the core, than the wish to turn God's universe upside down, and substitute for His purpose for it, as it is, our foolish fancy of it, as it might be.

I may miss my friend in a way that shall only impoverish my life and starve my soul and dry up the springs of faith and trust, cover the shining of the sun with sackcloth, and the very light of God's countenance with blackness. Or I may miss that friend in a way that shall somehow bring his essential spirit nearer to me, seeking to catch that generous flame of goodness, to make that frank and noble manhood or womanhood

live again through my soul, softened and purified by a divine pain, and kindled upon by that which is and ought to be the most contagious thing in the universe,—the holy health of another soul in whom God's loving kindness has shined into my life to the end that that life may be better, truer, more hopeful, more trustful forevermore.

I may turn away from my grief and seek to bury it by silence, and cover it by the hopelessness of a despair which will not look beyond the parting, or hurry from its secluded chamber into the distractions which some would-be physicians of the soul prescribe

as medicine for the sad spirit,—
travel or society or hard work.

I may seek the comfort which *time* will bring, and look forward to the poor happiness of half forgetting the beloved person whom to remember is what makes life worth living still, as if the fading of that star into the night would brighten the darkness. Or I may go straight to the heart of the trouble which is so sacred and deep, and in its inmost hiding-place find the living God, the loving Father, whose pity the loving and compassionate Christ makes so sure. Then from that sanctuary of peace I can go out serenely into the duties which seem so trivial, the work of living in the

human world of care and toil, and do something to make it better. ✓

It is very easy to settle into a despairing view of your own faults, or even sins, if you have a real conscience in the matter; and, if you have not, it is very easy to harden yourself into making bad habits a second nature, saying to evil, "Be thou my good." But the lesson of countless lives is that at no cost can we safely give up the vision of what life should be made with every one of us. No matter how far we fall short, nor how steep and hot the way is,— "the way of God's commandments," —the only escape

from falling back is to press forward.

Instead of trying to evade our lot, let us make ourselves at home in it. Look for the simple, wholesome refreshments that flow and sparkle by the wayside ; at the wealth and beauty of this wonderful universe, the resources of knowledge and happiness which flowers, trees, stars, stones, open to one who will study them,—the joy that we can find by simply lifting our eyes to the sky above us filled with light ; at the treasures of literature which wait for us, the greatest masters ready to whisper their thoughts in our ear every moment that we will listen.

Any one who will let himself think what we should find in our children (or in those of other people), and what we can do for them, need never complain that life has grown dim and stale.

Creation is ever doing God's will. Only the human soul can *choose* to do it, because only the human soul can leave it undone.

The error is often made — and that by good people — of supposing that the religious view of sacrifice takes in only that which is of a dolorous sort. The sacrifice of *the will* is indeed vital in Chris-

tianity, but that is not necessarily grievous. Indeed, the true surrender of the will opens out, by the richness of its compensations, by the sweetness of its communion, by the loyalty of its love, into a sacrifice of thanksgiving as well. We come "to do His will," and we find "in His presence fulness of joy."

It is the principle of sacrifice which makes history full of inspiration for us. In the recent great, heroic years, in how many thousands of homes the question was faced whether the call of duty really was so exigent and utter as to demand supreme renunciation! And the sons turned away from

home, from the smooth prosperities of long and sunny years, and went forth on the way which was the utter giving up of all that was closest to them, which led so often into unreturning paths ; and silence fell on the homes from which they had carried the light and the music.

But the camp-fires flashed on spirits richer and more content for knowing the meaning of sacrifice ; and many a silent home laid hold of great treasures of peace and trust, and opened new windows outward in sympathy and upward in faith.

There are two ways of regarding this rich human life. We can

think of it simply as a home in which we are to dwell, using all things as our own, tearing down its barns only that we may build greater, and shutting ourselves away from all the relations to the duty and opportunity which are always commensurate with privilege; or we can regard it as what it truly is, the temple of the living God, in which his children go in and out as in his courts, and which is not complete, but is building,—in whose walls every faithful life has a place. _____

Perhaps you have seen at Berlin the statue which was drawn up from the depths of the Tiber of the "*Juvenis Adorans*." A fig-

ure in the beauty of youthful vigor, full of manly grace and strength, stands clothed upon with the pure spirit of rapt devotion, his face glowing toward the free sky, his arms extended up and spread wide with upturned palms, seeming at once like soaring wings that bear him up, and like the imploring, outreaching of the human spirit that must draw down the blessing they seek for. That is the very spirit of the world as it freshly received the Christianity of the gospel.

And now set beside it another type of the same thought as expressed by Albrecht Dürer in one of his drawings. He has simply taken two hands folded together

and lifted up in prayer, as he saw them, it may be, in some church where the worshipper never knew what a lesson of trust and communion he might teach by that meek gesture which the artist saw, and caught forever. Only two folded hands uplifted, and those hands withered with age and worn with toil, homely and old and poor, but for that very reason expressing more completely the spiritual purpose which transfigures their commonness into religious beauty. They express in their mute petition the need that the real worker feels of the Invisible Strength to uphold his toil, the weariness which finds rest from life's burdens in the still

presence of the Most High, the submission which asks to see His Will in all things, and the gratitude which brings the countless mercies of a lifetime to lay before Him.

It is only here and there one who strikes the deeper chord of faith, and sees in Christ not merely moralist like John, nor enthusiast like Elias, nor patriot like Jeremiah, nor even prophet of the ancient Israel, but "the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Anointed One, who lives so near to God, who speaks so out of the heart of God's truth, that he has new communications for men, —not only the old revived,—

and who is authority and power and life, a divine force come into this human world.

Certainly, the heart of Christian faith to-day finds his religion a teacher of purer ethics, a political, regenerative power, a force of reform against the religious corruptions that crust over the life of the Church; but it finds in *him* a power beyond all these great forces. He is to it a deep fountain of life out of which flow all these great and good things, as the natural and inevitable consequence of what he *is*.

Of faith, being so radiant and pure a power, there ought to be

more to-day in the world than there ever was, because such a force must work in ever larger measure. And so I believe there truly is. Beneath all doubts of the questioning mind, beneath all unrest of the tossed and troubled age, the dead weight of luxury, the despairs of an unreal literature, the materialism of a selfish worldliness, still glow and burn at the heart of the world's best life these settled trusts, which are the best thing that the Past has handed down to us, and were the springs of its best life, and are the spring of ours. It is only the very multitude of its fruits that prevents us from seeing how rich and full itself is. The charities and practical

pieties, the honest lives and faithful work, the great company of noble men and women who find their inspiration in these mighty trusts,—we see them so bountifully that they fairly hide from us that which is the heart of them.

Have you not found in your own life that, though you have had never so little of it,—but as a grain of mustard seed,—if you proceed on that, it will greaten and grow? The places in which you have leaned on these trusts and found them uphold you, the faithfulness to which they have helped you, the glimpses that you have caught of what light and strength they might bring you in their fulness,—the youngest Chris-

tian has had some experience of them, and the oldest has not begun to exhaust them.

Let men peer as close as they may into the secrets of nature, they do not analyze away the fact that God, the mysterious, the unnamable, can yet delight in man, and man in Him.

By the need of our nature, by the teaching of our Master, by the attributes of God Himself it is that we believe that the souls who met us in the contact of the eye and hand, who looked on us through the transparent medium

of the fleshy presence which was so dear to us because it housed for us immortal spirits, exist still, with the powers of an endless life.

I do not need my friend's presence with me to assure me that we are in vital sympathy. Though the breadth of a continent lies between us, though the waves of the furthest seas toss between him and his home, the distance melts into nothing. I know, wherever he is, in place or in action, that in heart he is with me still. It is not the letter, slowly travelling the weary leagues of intervening space, which keeps you in close intercourse: it is that you know the heart to be

unchanged, tender, regardful, true, and that not all the separations of time or space dull one throb of the love whose neighborhood was your comfort and cheer.

Surely, the assurance is not less strong that the soul must retain these feelings beyond the very grave and gate of death. Could the mother, think you, pass through any change which would prevent her whole nature from leaping up with intense love at the thought of her child, were it before the very throne of God? Can the child, whose little lips she taught to utter their first prayer, cease to mention her name in its holiest moments of drawing nearest to God, though the sweep and com-

pass of its petitions should be expanded to the prayer of an angel in the highest heaven?

Nay, our conceptions of that immortal world in the light of Jesus Christ compel us to see that, instead of being dimmed or effaced by the transition from earth, the nature must be deepened and intensified. Death! what is it when Jesus speaks of it but the setting free from the limitations and imperfections incident to our mortality?

Who that has ever known the divineness of the love that knits together parent and child, friend and friend, can doubt that this

emotion whose roots penetrate the inmost being is quickened by the new flood of life which we believe is poured by that great change into all the powers of the soul?

It follows necessarily from our faith in God that we must believe in the immortality of the affections. God cannot deceive us. The truth of His own Being is our proof that the sentiments which He has implanted in our human natures are true. It is beyond our conceiving that He should have given us affections which long to be immortal, whose assurance that they shall be so gains in depth and power as they

gain in loftiness and purity, unless He meant to satisfy that strong desire.

When our thought of the departed is strongest, the clouds which hang between roll away. There is a sympathy more vital than any outward contact, in which we feel that even in the darkness and the solitude we are partakers, in the glorious words of the Apostle, "of the inheritance of the saints in light."

What though we, in obscure walks of duty, in the right ordering of Christian homes, in simple steadfastness of trying to do what is laid on us to do, toil on, perhaps with little human sympathy, while

they, with stronger powers and better accomplishment, labor elsewhere? It is still the same path of service: in God's sight mortal and immortal may be seen as laboring side by side.

The Communion of Saints! On our side the consciousness of fellowship with them in all that is true, holy, eternal; on theirs, all this, and also (can we doubt it?) such knowledge of us as is best, seeing our lot in the light of God's great purpose for us, and understanding it all.

What that communion shall be when *we* also come to the fruition of that immortality in which we

even now share with them in part, we can only dimly apprehend, through the very excess of light, as we look forward. To *us* the meeting once again with those who filled life with blessing for us, and not alone with the friends whom we have known, but with all the company of the great and good, whose example has encouraged us or whose teachings have strengthened us ; and chief of all with Him, the lover of our souls, in whom we are called to the hope of immortality : to *them* the welcome to those whose trials they have watched, whose progress they have shared, as they have compassed us about at every stage

of our advance "with so great a cloud of witnesses."

We come to see how the Lord of the harvest will take even the scanty, half-withered grain that is all which, in some moods of our spirit, we can gather up out of our lives and lay down before Him, and even out of that will give us something which is the bread of life for our souls, and may have divine food for other souls also. Out of our resolutions, imperfect, fitful, a consecrated purpose; out of our struggles, spasmodic and half-hearted, a fixed effort after goodness; out of our failures and our sins, an awe-full sense of our

need of His mercy and His light ;
out of our religion, with its dim
groping after the Help which is all
the time so near, at last the trust
of a disciple and “the peace of
God.”

